INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank each of you for your work on behalf of human rights, and for the opportunity to give testimony today. Let me begin with a brief tribute to the outgoing sub-committee chairman, Mr. Smith, whom I first met when I joined the office of international religious freedom in 1999. Chris Smith has been an inspiration to me and to countless others who work for the advancement of religious freedom. I learned from him that this right is not a luxury or an "add-on." As he has said so often, religious freedom lies at the heart of human dignity. Without the right to pursue transcendent meaning and truth, no human being can be said to be truly free. And unless it protects and nourishes this right, no political order can endure, let alone provide for the flourishing of all its citizens. Thank you, Mr. Smith, for being a champion of human dignity and of the truly liberal state.

I have been asked to give my views on religious freedom and U.S. foreign policy, so let me go straight to the bottom line: I believe the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) is a dynamic piece of legislation whose policy implementation has been far too narrow. On its face IRFA requires the advancement of religious freedom, but the State Department has not emphasized that goal. Until very recently, it has focused almost exclusively on denouncing religious persecution and freeing religious prisoners. Those are noble objectives, worthy of our nation, but they do not constitute a policy of promoting religious freedom. IRFA was passed before 9/11, but its provisions are broad enough that U.S. IRF policy can and should contribute to the pursuit of national security strategies such as undermining Islamist extremism and encouraging stable, liberal self-government in the Middle East and elsewhere.

A regime of religious liberty is characterized by much more than the absence of persecution. Religious freedom anchors a political order in which individuals and religious communities are free to act publicly in significant ways – to worship, to manifest religious truth claims, and to influence public policy, bounded only by the norms of liberal democracy. Where religious liberty exists, the natural tensions between the claims of religion and the claims of the liberal state have been reconciled in ways that can be sustained by the political culture. If U.S. diplomacy were successful in encouraging this aspect of democratic development, it would help ensure that democratic elections and democratic constitutions yielded stable, liberal governments rather than fragile concoctions of sectarian interest groups.

Consider Afghanistan. I would argue that our religious freedom policy there has succeeded only in the narrowest sense. With the overthrow of the Taliban, religious persecution decreased dramatically, but even democratic elections and a constitution did not produce a regime of religious freedom. When Abdul Rahman was tried for apostasy in March of this year, his crime merited execution under the prosecutor's understanding of the Afghan democratic constitution. It is true that U.S. pressure freed Mr. Rahman and

allowed him to flee the country. But I would submit that the Rahman trial was a red flag, a clear signal that Afghan democracy contains a fault line which ensures its fragility, especially in the face of a resurgent Taliban and the ideas it represents.

I want to give you some concrete examples of what I believe U.S. IRF policy should be doing to address this kind of problem, but first let me note some of the things that have gone right with the law's implementation. As you know, the State Department's office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is charged with implementing IRF policy. In order for that policy to be successful, the Ambassador and his office must have the resources and the support within the Department to do the job. When I joined the IRF office in the summer of 1999 I brought its personnel strength to a grand total of three – Ambassador Bob Seiple, a Navy chaplain and yours truly. Quite frankly there was very little enthusiasm within the Department about letting that office grow in size or influence. It was bureaucratically quarantined in the human rights bureau, and when Ambassador Seiple departed, some argued internally that the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights should be "double hatted" as Ambassador at Large. For years it was the Assistant Secretary, not the Ambassador, who actually controlled the IRF Report.

Today Ambassador John Hanford presides over a large and growing staff of outstanding officers, thanks in part to the assistance of people like Representatives Frank Wolf and Chris Smith. The IRF Report itself is at least a partial success story. It is widely recognized as the best compendium of the status of religious persecution in the world. More than any other single factor, the Report has changed attitudes within the Foreign Service about religion and religious freedom, simply because of the research required to complete it. This year, for the first time since IRFA was passed, the Report is under the Ambassador's sole control, not that of the bureau of Human Rights. This is critical if the Report is to evolve from being a catalogue of horrors, however accurate, to a policy tool supporting the advancement of religious freedom.

There have been other successes. Ambassador Bob Seiple was almost singlehandedly responsible for ensuring that China was among the first countries designated as a country of particular concern under the IRF Act. He was also personally responsible for freeing scores of men and women languishing in jails simply because of their religious beliefs. Ambassador John Hanford has employed the Act as more than a vehicle to publish lists of the worst persecuting governments – lists whose currency has, in my view, long since been discredited. I do not believe that unilateral economic sanctions alone can be effective in driving long-term changes in political culture. But to threaten sanctions and never deliver them is a policy of crying wolf, which is worse than no policy at all.

Ambassador Hanford has not only actually applied sanctions for the first time (against Eritrea), but far more importantly he is using the law to negotiate with persecuting governments. He has concluded agreements with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Vietnam. I am, quite frankly, skeptical that those agreements are going to yield substantive changes over the long term, but I applaud Ambassador Hanford and his

staff for pursuing and achieving them. At the very least, he is developing a model than can be employed in the future with greater success, provided other changes take place.

Despite these successes, and the dedicated people who have brought them about, it remains true that the IRF office, the Ambassador at Large, and the policy of promoting international religious freedom are bureaucratically and functionally isolated within the Department of State. Their potential, in my view, remains grossly under exploited.

Let me turn to what I believe needs to happen if U.S. IRF policy is to emerge from its isolation and provide more than a negative, narrow focus on persecution, a policy which is too often viewed by foreign governments as a problem of "America management." Let me be clear: our policy *should* reduce persecution and free prisoners. But it can do so more effectively by promoting regimes of religious liberty that not only attack persecution but also address one of the most critical national security issues of the 21st century: the relationship between the authorities of religion and state.

The first step is for the State Department in general, and American diplomats in particular, to abandon their secularistic tendency to treat religion as a private matter or a subject somehow unfit for policy analysis or action. American diplomacy must accept the reality that the world of the 21st century will be suffused with religion and that religion must not simply be viewed as part of the problem. Most religious communities, whether they are Muslim, Christian, Hindu or other, seek by their nature to influence the rules and norms under which their adherents live. Our challenge in attempting to facilitate stable, liberal self government is not to privatize religious expression but to entice religious communities to embrace liberal norms as consistent with their beliefs.

That, of course, is a tall order. I am not suggesting that all American diplomats become theologians. I *am* suggesting that they become realists about religion, addressing it much as they do politics or economics, that is, as a powerful, natural human enterprise that influences how men, women and governments act. We must integrate this thinking into our strategies, whether we are trying to undermine Islamist extremism, counter China's anti-religion policies, or influence the Islamist political party that governs democratic Turkey.

Consider Egypt, where for half a century a secular autocracy has dominated political life. If free and fair elections were held today, they would likely be won by the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamist party, which is why we are no longer pressing for elections. But despotism will not last forever in Egypt; free elections will very likely take place in the foreseeable future. And yet, the U.S. is not seeking to influence Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or the more liberal Hizb al Wasat, for fear of "legitimizing" them. But they, not our favored Egyptian secularists, are likely to win elections. Unfortunately, even if we did engage Islamists, we currently lack the discernment and the vocabulary to influence them.

This must change. Our IRF policy should be the vehicle for serious interaction with selected Islamist groups in Egypt and elsewhere. Our goal in each of these areas

should be, first, to assess the potential attraction of particular Islamist groups to liberal norms. For those meeting this test, we should work to demonstrate how a liberal political order can benefit *their* communities, in *their* culture, with *their* truth claims. We must do this work through private diplomacy, public diplomacy, intelligence analysis, U.S. funded democracy promotion programs, inter-religious dialogues and the like.

We must stop treating religion as a pathology, and integrate it into our thinking about politics and economics. Persecution and the absence of religious freedom impact the vital interests of most nations, including their political stability and economic performance. When our economic officers discuss development issues, for example, they should know how to elaborate the potential economic contributions of religious communities. In other words, the advancement of religious freedom should not be the job of one Ambassador and one office who are too often viewed by both sides as a compartmentalized "special interest" messenger.

Within the State Department the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom should be given the authority IRFA prescribes. He and his office should be at the center of public and private diplomacy in the Muslim world and elsewhere when religion is a factor. The American Foreign Service should adopt a religion sub-specialty under political and economic training, analogous to sub specialties in arms control or trade. <u>All</u> our diplomats around the world should be capable of discussing religion as part of politics, economics, and of life as it is lived. Religious freedom matters in our embassies abroad should no longer be left to the most junior human rights officers, who often feel saddled with an unwanted and unrewarded task that will not help their careers.

There is, of course, much more to be said. What I am suggesting would require significant policy decisions by a President and a Secretary of State, new training and incentives for diplomats, and much more. I believe all this is consistent with IRFA as currently configured. Amendments to the law may be wise over the long term, but I see no obstacle in the current statute to the kind of policy I am suggesting.

Above all, this subject needs public debate – especially in Congress and among policy makers and scholars. That debate should be free as far as possible from the rancor that often attends discussions about religion in America. This is not a blue-state, red-state issue. It is a question of the security and well being of the American people, who expect and deserve a foreign policy that encounters the world as it is, rather than as we might wish it to be. That world, for better or worse, promises to be heavily influenced by religious actors for the foreseeable future. American diplomacy must work to ensure that it is also one of ordered liberty.